

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application in light of the following discussion is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-9, 11-19, and 21-24 are presently active. Claims 10 and 20 have been cancelled without prejudice. Claims have been presently amended.

In the enclosed Office Action, Claims 1-6, 7, 9, and 15-18 were indicated as being allowed. Claims 9-11, 19-21, 22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Osaka et al (U.S. Pat. No. 4,812,010), hereinafter Osaka. Claims 14 and 24 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Osaka et al.

Firstly, Applicants acknowledge with appreciation the indication of allowance for Claims 1-6, 7, 9, and 15-18.

Secondly, Applicants have clarified independent Claims 9 and 19 based on subject matter found in originally filed Claims 1 and Claim 10. No new matter has been added.

Response to the objection to the drawings

Corrected drawings with “Related Art” thereon have been submitted. Therefore, the objection to Figures 1-3 should be withdrawn.

Regarding the optical fiber guide sections, the reference numeral “24” of “plural pieces of optical fiber guide sections 24” on page 14, line 16 of the specification has been amended to recite “optical fiber guide sections 21” as supported elsewhere in the specification. Presently, the claim limitation “optical fiber guide sections” are described in the specification and shown in the drawings as optical fiber guide sections 21. Accordingly, the objection to the drawings under 37 C.F.R. § 1.83(a) has been overcome.

Response to the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b)

As recited in the amended Claim 9, the optical fiber axial alignment device of the claimed invention comprises a butt alignment section having at least one pair of butt alignment grooves formed apart from one another with a given distance in an opposing relationship on a substantially straight line; optical fiber guide sections, each having at least one pair of guide grooves, and disposed on both sides of the butt alignment section, to be movable upward above and downward below the butt alignment section; and optical fiber holder sections, configured to hold at least one pair of the optical fibers, located so as to interpose the butt alignment section and the optical fiber guide sections therebetween.

Osaka teaches an apparatus including a coupling stage 17 and a clamping device 11, as shown in Figure 7. The coupling stage 17 is provide in order such that end portions 4 of the fibers are confronted with each other to be fusion-spliced thereon (fourth column, lines 11 to 18). The clamping device 11 is provided in order that a plurality of coated optical fibers 1 are clamped, including a base 21 with a plurality of V-shaped grooves 22 as shown in Figure 4b for positioning the coated optical fibers 1 on the upper face thereof and an upper lid 23 with an adhesive layer 24 provided on its inner face and being placed on a base 21 (third column, lines 42 to 51).

Since the clamping devices 11 are disposed on both sides of the coupling stage 17 (See Figure 7), these devices resemble the optical fiber guide sections of the claimed invention. However, Osaka fails to expressly teach that the clamping device 11 can move upward above and down below the coupling stage 17, which indicates the clamping devices 11 are different from the optical fiber guide sections of the present invention. In addition, even if the clamping devices 11 could correspond to the optical fiber guide section, Osaka's apparatus lacks the claimed optical fiber holder sections that are located so as to interpose the butt alignment section and the optical fiber guide sections therebetween.

Alternatively, since Osaka's clamping devices 11 hold the coated optical fibers between the upper lid 23 and the base 21 by aid of the adhesive layer 24, the clamping devices 11 might correspond to the optical fiber holder sections of the claimed invention. However, under that interpretation, Osaka's apparatus lacks the claimed optical fiber guide sections that are disposed between the butt alignment section and the optical fiber holder section.

In view of the foregoing, Osaka fails to teach all the features of the invention set forth with the amended Claim 9 of the present application. Therefore, the Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection to Claim 9 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) should be withdrawn.

Claim 11 has all the features recited in Claim 9 and thus the invention set forth therewith is not anticipated or made obvious by Osaka. Therefore, the rejection to Claim 11 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) should also be withdrawn.

In addition, since Claim 19 has substantially the same features as Claim 9, the rejection to Claim 19 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) should be withdrawn. Also, the rejection to Claim 21 depending from Claim 19 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) should be withdrawn.

Response to the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

The invention set forth with the Claim 14 has all the features recited in the amended Claim 9 and "image pick up means" for detecting an aligned status of the optical fibers on the butt alignment grooves to produce a picture signal. Since Osaka fails to disclose or suggest all the features of the amended Claim 9 as stated above, Osaka does not make obvious Claim 14.

In addition, the invention set forth with Claim 9 has been made in view of a disadvantage in a related-art apparatus. That is, Applicants submit there has long been a disadvantage that optical fibers to be aligned can be easily displaced from the grooves of a pedestal (or stage) when the optical fibers are only held by optical fiber holders since the

optical fibers are fine (e.g., less than 0.1 mm, approximately) and there exists a gap between the optical fiber holders and the pedestal. Such a disadvantage is eliminated by the optical fiber guide sections disposed between the butt alignment section and the optical fiber holder section because the optical fiber guide sections can facilitate the optical fiber to be received in the butt alignment grooves of the butt alignment section by moving the optical fiber upward above and downward below the butt alignment section after the optical fiber holder sections are positioned, thereby improving workability (See specification, page 3, lines 13-18). Thus, the present invention solves a long recognized problem.

Hence, for at least these reasons, independent Claims 9 and 19 (and the claims dependent therefrom) patentably define over Osaka.

Consequently, in light of the above discussions, the outstanding grounds for rejection are believed to have been overcome. The application as amended herewith is believed to be in condition for formal allowance. An early and favorable action to that effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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IN THE DRAWINGS

The attached sheets of drawings include changes to Figs. 1-3. These sheets, which include Figs. 1-3, replace the original sheets including Figs. 1-3.

Attachment: Replacement Sheets